

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 3173

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, AF

SUBJECT: THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN AFGHANISTAN

1. SUMMARY. THE AFGHAN POLITICAL SCENE IN THE WEEKS FOLLOWING PRESIDENT DAOUD'S APPOINTMENT OF A COMMISSION TO REVIEW A NEW CONSTITUTION HAS BEEN UNUSUALLY QUIET. IN THIS TOWN OF RUMORS, SPECULATION REGARDING THE CONSTITUTION AND ITS PROVISIONS IS REMARKABLY LACKING. IN ITS PLACE IS CYNICISM ABOUT DAOUD'S MOTIVES AND, STRANGELY, A SPATE OF RUMORS OF COUP-PLOTTING WHICH CONTRIBUTES TO A STATE OF ENHANCED NERVOUSNESS AND TENSION. EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE HOWEVER DAOUD REGIME IN ANY DANGER. END SUMMARY.

2. WHEN PRESIDENT DAOUD ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 22 THAT A NEW CONSTITUTION HAD BEEN PREPARED AND SENT TO A COMMISSION OF TWENTY MEMBERS FOR SCRUTINY (KABUL 2105), IT SEEMED POSSIBLE THAT A NEW CHAPTER IN AFGHANISTAN'S POLITICAL HISTORY WAS ABOUT TO BE WRITTEN. THIS WAS DAOUD'S GREATEST GESTURE TOWARD BROADENING THE CONSENSUS BY WHICH HE GOVERNS. YET THIS POLITICAL EVENT, WHICH COULD CONCEIVABLY HAVE

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OPENED POLITICAL DEBATE IN THE COUNTRY, HAS BEEN

MORE LIKE THE DROPPING OF A LARGE STONE INTO A BARREL OF OIL: THE CONSTITUTION (IF INDEED THERE IS ONE) APPEARS TO HAVE SUNK, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING, WITHOUT A TRACE. ONE DOES NOT EVEN HEAR RUMORS OF WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MIGHT CONTAIN, ALTHOUGH ITS PROVISIONS, PARTICULARLY REGARDING SUCCESSION TO THE PRESIDENCY, MIGHT BE ASSUMED OF CONSIDERABLE INTEREST TO ALL POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS AFGHANS.

3. THE COMMITTEE ITSELF HAS MET TWICE, ON MARCH 30 AND APRIL 22, TO DISCUSS ITS WORK. AT THE FIRST MEETING MINISTER OF JUSTICE ABDUL MAJID WAS UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED THE COMMISSION'S PRESIDENT, AS MAY WELL HAVE BEEN EXPECTED BOTH FROM THE WEIGHT OF HIS OWN PRESTIGE AND FROM DAOUD'S ANNOUNCING FORMATION OF THE COMMISSION IN A LETTER TO ABDUL MAJID, AS THOUGH TO SPOT HIM FOR THIS RESPONSIBILITY. AT THE SECOND MEETING OTHER OFFICERS WERE SELECTED: WAFIULLAH SAMAYEE BECAME SECRETARY TO THE COMMISSION AND ISMAIL QASEMYAR HIS ASSISTANT. (SAMAYEE IS SECOND DEPUTY MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND QASEMYAR AN OFFICIAL OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE. KABUL A-29 CONTAINS MORE COMPLETE BIO INFORMATION.)

4. EVEN NOW IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER COMMISSION MEMBERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN COPIES OF THE DOCUMENT THEY HAVE BEEN ASSEMBLED TO STUDY. (WE ARE NOT IN FACT POSITIVE AN ACTUAL TEXT EXISTS.) AT THE FIRST MEETING ABDUL MAJID HELD UP A THICK DOCUMENT PURPORTED TO BE A DRAFT OF THE CONSTITUTION, BUT HE DID NOT OFFER A LOOK AT ITS CONTENTS OR A SUMMARY OF HIS OWN UNDERSTANDING OF IT. ABDUL MAJID INSTEAD REPORTEDLY GAVE A KIND OF PEP TALK ABOUT THE SERIOUS NATURE OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK, AND THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT HAD FALLEN ON ITS MEMBERS. MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION THEN PROCEEDED TO DEBATE WHETHER EACH PERSON SHOULD STUDY THE CONSTITUTION IN ITS ENTIRETY OR DIVIDE THE DOCUMENT INTO COMPONENT

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PARTS FOR STUDY BY SUB-COMMITTEES. THE COMMISSION PRESIDENT TOOK THE DOCUMENT WITH HIM UPON DEPARTURE, AND ALTHOUGH LESS HAS BEEN LEARNED ABOUT THE COMMISSION'S SECOND MEETING WE HAVE YET TO HEAR THAT DRAFTS OF THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTION EXIST IN NUMBER AND ARE FREELY AVAILABLE TO COMMISSION MEMBERS.

5. OPINIONS WE HAVE HEARD OF THE COMMISSION'S

MEMBERSHIP HAVE BEEN GENERALLY CYNICAL, A STATE OF MIND PROPAGANDA EMANATING FROM PAKISTAN WAS QUICK TO EXPLOIT. NOR HAS THIS CYNICISM BEEN CONFINED TO THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT. REPORTS ARE THAT PAK PROPAGANDA DERIDING THE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION, WHICH WAS BOTH MORDANT AND AMUSING, BECAME OVERNIGHT A WIDELY QUOTED KABUL JOKE. OTHER REPORTS ARE THAT THE COMMISSION HAS BEEN WIDELY AND DERISIVELY DISCUSSED AT KABUL UNIVERSITY. MANY PEOPLE APPARENTLY VIEW THE COMMISSION AND ITS WORK AS A "FOOT DRAGGING EXERCISE".

6. ONE ESPECIALLY CYNICAL VIEW OF THE COMMISSION IS THAT DAOUD HAS DELIBERATELY SET UP A GROUP MOSTLY OF NON-MOHAMMADZAI, NONENTITIES PRECISELY IN ORDER TO WATCH THE ENDEAVOR FAIL. CYNICS, AGAIN, HAVE IT THAT THIS WOULD PRESENT DAOUD WITH THE BEST OF OPPOSING WORLDS: HE WOULD HAVE "DELIVERED" ON HIS PROMISE OF A CONSTITUTION, BUT HE WOULD BE LEFT WITH NO DOCUMENT WHICH MIGHT TIE HIS HANDS OR ALTER HIS METHOD OF CONTROL. DAOUD AND HIS MOHAMMADZAI RELATIVES WOULD AS WELL HAVE ESCAPED THE OPPROBRIUM OF FAILURE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL ENDEAVOR. THIS VIEW HOWEVER SEEMS TO IMPLY THAT DAOUD EITHER PLANS TO LIVE FOREVER OR THAT HE IS OBLIVIOUS TO THE NEED TO PROVIDE A SUCCESSION. THIS APPEARS TO US A HARSH JUDGMENT UPON A MAN WHOSE PATRIOTISM IS UNDOUBTED AND WHOSE HARDREALISM ABOUT MOST THINGS MIGHT BE PRESUMED TO INCLUDE REALISM ABOUT HIS OWN MORTALITY.

7. MORE IMPORTANT HOWEVER THAN PREDICTABLE
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CARPING AND CHARACTER ASSASSINATION IS THE FACT THAT NO AFGHANS WITH WHOM WE ARE ACQUAINTED SEEM TO FIND THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION AN EVENT IN WHICH THEIR OWN POLITICAL VIEWS CAN BE OR EVEN OUGHT TO BE REGISTERED. IT IS BY CONSENSUS A DICTATED DOCUMENT WHICH WILL BE PROMULGATED; IT IS NOT NOW A MATTER FOR DEBATE AND FOR THAT MATTER MAY OR MAY NOT EVER BECOME ONE. SPECULATION IS THAT DAOUD WILL SOMEHOW MANAGE TO RIG AN APPROVING "NATIONAL ASSEMBLY" ("LOYA JIRGAH") JUST AS HE HAS RIGGED ALL THINGS HERETOFORE. (COMMENT: THIS TOO STRIKES US AS CYNICAL. LARGE AFGHAN GATHERINGS ARE VOLATILE. THE GREAT "LOYA JIRGAH" WHICH APPROVED THE 1964 CONSTITUTION WAS NOT A TAME BODY ASSEMBLED TO

APPLY A RUBBER STAMP. NOR WAS THIS THE CASE OF THE "JIRGAH" DAOUD HIMSELF CALLED TOGETHER IN NOVEMBER OF 1955 TO APPROVE HIS HANDLING OF RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN AND THE PUSHTUNISTAN ISSUE. TO BE SURE BOTH CASES DEMONSTRATE THE CLEAR ADVANTAGES THAT ACCRUE TO A WELL ORGANIZED GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBLE FOR DRAFTING, OVER A LARGE AND

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AMORPHOUS BODY ASSEMBLED AD HOC.)

8. POLITICAL RALK HOWEVER DOES NOT END IN KABUL MERELY BECAUSE POLITICS HAS ENTERED A NEW AND PUZZLING PHASE IN WHICH NO ONE QUITE KNOWS HOW TO ACT AND EVEN SPECULGMION IS STRAINED. PERHAPS FOR OTHER REASONS, PERHAPS PRECISELY BECAUSE "UNDERSTANDABLE" POLITICS HAVE BEEN DERAILED BY DAOUD'S UNWONTED DEMOCRATIC GESTURE, RUMORS OF COUP HAVE COME TO US FROM SEVERAL SOURCES. LOGIC WOULD HAVE IT THAT ANYONE WHO MIGHT IN FACT SEEK TO TURN DAOUD OUT OF OFFICE SHOULD MOVE QUICKLY -- OR, THAT IS, AT LEAST AHEAD OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS. WHILE IT OUGHT NOT TO BE ARGUED THAT LEGALITY WOULD WEIGH HEAVILY ON THE MINDS

OF ANY PERSON WHO MIGHT SEEK DAOUD'S OVERTHROW
NEITHER SHOULD IT BE DENIED THAT A SUCCESSFUL
COUP AGAINST DAOUD'S ESSENTIALLY SELF-PROCLAIMED
RULE WOULD FIND GREATER ACCEPTANCE INTERNATIONALLY
NOW THAN WOULD BE THE CASE AFTER DAOUD'S REGIME
HAS BEEN AFFIRMED BY SOME KIND OF PUBLIC EXPRES-
SION. COUP RUMORS EMANATE FROM THE MOHAMMADZAI
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CLAN ITSLEF, FROM THE MILITARY, AND FROM A MYSTERIOUS
CABAL WHICH PRESENTS ITSELF AS NATIONALISTIC AND
PROGRESSIVE. RUMORS OF A LEFTIST COUP HAVE
APPEARED TO US IN THE GUISE OF NERVOUS INQUIRY
ON THE PART OF RANKING MEMBERS OF "THE AFGHAN
ESTABLISHMENT".

9. EMBASSY HAS COMMENTED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS
HOW VULNERABLE DAOUD IS TO AN ASSASSIN'S BULLET
OR THE RAVAGES OF AGE AND ILLNESS. IN THIS
CONNECTION IT IS INTERESTING THAT JUST AS PRE-
VALENT AS COUP RUMORS HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD
CONCERN DURING THE PAST FEW MONTHS OVER DAOUD'S
HEALTH. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT THIS CONCERN
HAS BEEN EXPRESSED PRIVATELY BY LEADERS OF
NEIGHBORING NATIONS. AT ONE POINT THERE WAS
EVEN THE BAZAAR RUMOR (AND ALSO THE BIZARRE
RUMOR, SINCE IT WAS ALL ALONG DEMONSTRABLY
UNTRUE) THAT DAOUD HAD DIED. YET IN THE CLOSED
AND INTRICATE WORLD IN WHICH THE AFGHAN PRESIDENT
LIVES, IN WHICH VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING IS HELD
SECRET, IT IS PERHAPS NOT SURPRISING THAT SUCH
RUMORS SHOULD ABOUND. IT IS ONLY THEIR INTENSITY
AND VOLUME THAT DEMONSTRATE KABUL'S CURRENT
EDGINESS. WE FOR OUR PART BELIEVE DAOUD IS IN GOOD
HEALTH.

10. ASIDE, HOWEVER, FROM THE EVER PRESENT POSSI-
BILITY OF DISABLING ILLNESS OR ASSASSINATION, EMBASSY
STANDS WITH ITS VIEW THAT DAOUD IS IN THOROUGH
CONTROL OF AFGHANISTAN'S GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL
PROCESSES.
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